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Mussels and Perseverance Pay Off

Mussel Farmer Vesselin Prokopiev Carves Out a Niche on the Black Sea Coast



Photo: USAID

Mussel farm and restaurant owner Vesselin Prokopiev takes a chance to relax with guests at his seaside restaurant.

Tucked away in a quiet cove framed by rocky cliffs on Bulgaria's northern Black Sea coast, the Dalboka Restaurant offers guests stunning sunsets over the water and a tranquil atmosphere. But perhaps the biggest attraction is the possibility to feast on just-caught mussels cooked in up to 60 different ways—even as dessert.

"I was in the Bulgarian navy and traveled the world for eight years," says owner Vesselin Prokopiev. "I saw how mussels were cooked in many other countries. But in Bulgaria, they were being thrown away. When I bought this land, it was hard to convince a bureaucrat sitting in Sofia about a new idea."

Prokopiev turned to the Bulgarian American Credit Bank (BACB), the bank of the Bulgarian American Enterprise Fund (BAEF), the only institution willing to extend him credit to open a mussel farm. BACB first provided financing for the mussel farm in 2003. Opening a restaurant was a secondary goal, but now clients including politicians and other high-profile types travel all the way from Sofia just for a special meal at one of his tables overlooking the beach. He also supplies mussels to restaurants in the capital.

Prokopiev shrugs off suggestions that he should write a cookbook or seek publicity from travel or food magazines. His main interest is in expanding his mussel farming, and he received financing from BACB to extend the farm in 2006. He's optimistic about the future: "The challenges of doing business in Bulgaria have prepared me for anything."

The Dalboka mussel farm is one of many successful Bulgarian businesses that received BAEF investment since 1991, when BAEF was established with an initial U.S. Government investment of \$58 million.